

Da'wah by action - 10 points of practical Advice

The Prophet (S) said: "By Allah, if Allah were to guide one man through you, it would be better for you than a red camel." [Saheeh Bukhari and Muslim] – A red camel was a prized possession amongst the Arabs at the time and it was a way of illustrating the significance of the act of guiding someone to Islam.

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam in many parts of the world was due to the simplicity of its message and values and high morals that its adherents possessed. Muslims led by example in their daily lives and when dealing with others, they would interact with fairness and justice.

The manners of the Muslims need to be exemplary so that non-Muslims begin to judge Islam by the people who adhere to it, rather than the misinformation and negative media coverage of those who in essence, do not adhere to it. If people know you to be Muslim, consciously or subconsciously, they may receive guidance from the way you behave and carry yourself. To attract thirsty hearts to the path of Allah, Muslims need to understand to apply and teach the beauty of Islam fully. Of course, this can only be attained if the faith is truly practised inwardly so that its effects appear outwardly on the persona.

Muslims need encapsulate the Qur'an within their characters just as the Prophet (S) did; When asked about the Prophet's manners, `Aishah (R), the mother of the believers said: "He (S) was the walking Qur'an". This simple narrative reflects upon his (S) leading a comprehensive yet perfect life by being the living embodiment of the noble teachings and principles of the Qur'an.

To begin to make a positive change and impact within our local communities, the following ten-point list has been devised which every Muslim can put into general practise without difficulty 'inshaa Allaah. It is by no means exhaustive; however it will provide guidelines and some practical steps in implementing a more cohesive da'wah:

1. Be gentle and show kindness to the people

The Prophet (S) said: "Indeed, gentleness adds more beauty to the atmosphere it reposes therein." [?]. This is an immense rule of conduct to the effect gentleness has psychologically and within an environment. It reflects Prophet's (S) own approach, which in many cases led to softening the hearts of those who had enmity towards Islam and the Muslims.

Whether explaining, discussing or advising, Muslims must show the good manners which Islam exhorts them to. There is no better key to unlock the heart than kindness and gentleness. The Prophet (S) said, "Kindness is not to be found in anything but that it adds to its beauty, and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective." [Saheeh Muslim]

2. Consider your audience.

It is important to consider your audience. You should know the level of understanding they have and the type of language they would easily grasp. Addressing students in an academic arena for example, would demand more accuracy in presenting arguments than is needed when addressing another forum. Each situation calls for a specific approach and a suitable time because you will not find attentive ears all the time.

3. Relate to people

Relating to a person or their interests during an encounter helps you 'bond' with them and to be on the same 'wavelength'. For example, if you know someone at the gym, then it is likely that they take good care of their diet. Explaining to them the value of certain types of foods and their benefits (most of which are commonly known and accepted to be beneficial) from an Islamic perspective, opens their eyes to aspects of Islamic teachings they were probably never aware of. This may lead to more interest in Islam and more questions.

The Prophet (S) wrestled with a number of men, one of whom was Rukanah ibn `Abd Yazid ibn Hashim ibn `Abdul-Muttalib, who lived in Makkah and was a skillful wrestler. The Prophet (S) outclassed and defeated him at his own skill, which was a cause for him to embrace Islam. This incident highlights the importance of relating with a person. Had the Prophet (S) beat him in another sport; it would not have been an effective means.

Imam Ibn Qayyim said in his Fawa'id: "The smart one calls the people to Allah from their dunya, and this makes it easier for them to respond to him. The zahid (ascetic) calls them to Allah by way of abandoning the dunya, and this makes it hard for them to respond, since it is very hard to pull someone away from the breast that he has developed his mind while suckling on..."

4. Prepare a five-minute Da'wah queue

Living in the West, we all must know that Allah has blessed the Muslims with a great opportunity - the opportunity of da'wah. Whether you are at work or at school, someone, somewhere, will ask you who you are or why you do something. This is when your 'five-minute da'wah' opportunity can make a difference. You can explain Islam to someone who never had an opportunity to find out, therefore; be fully prepared and brief in your speech, highlighting the major aspects like the five pillars of Islam and six pillars of faith and Tawheed (monotheism) as well as the exemplarily peace and tolerance that are achieved through Islam's social justice for example.

5. Invite neighbours to tea or take a gift to them.

Allah SWT says in the Qur'an: "Serve Allah and join not any partners with Him: Show kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans,

and the needy, and to the neighbour who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbour who is not of kin and the fellow traveller and what your right hands possess: for Allah loves not the arrogant the vainglorious.” [translation of Surah An-Nisaa,36]

Muslims, get to know your neighbours, or at least greet them when you see them! There are so many ahadeeth that speak about the rights of neighbours in Islam and cultivating good relations with them, amongst which the Prophet (S) said “...Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his neighbour...” [Al-Muwatta, Vol. 49, No. 22]

In some parts of the country, there are Muslims who do not know their neighbours because they have never seen them or deliberately try to avoid them. This situation is not acceptable and needs to change.

Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-'As (RA) reports that: “Mujahid said that Abdullah ibn Amr slaughtered a sheep and said ‘Have you presented a gift from it to my neighbour, the Jew, for I heard the Prophet of Allah (S) say: Gabriel kept on commending the neighbour to me so much so, that I thought he would make an heir?’ [Sunan Abu Dawood, 2446]

The neighbour holds a special status in Islam. Islam encourages Muslims to treat their neighbours in a gentle way that reflects the true and genuine spirit of Islam as exemplified in its tolerance. It makes no difference whether the neighbours are Muslim or non-Muslim.

6. Soften the heart with a smile

What does a smile and a hello cost? It is encouraged to be courteous, as you never know when your courtesy may change a person's perception. We know that a smile is a charity and there is a growing body of evidence that indicates that smiling has a positive effect on human mood and substantially improves it; smiling also has an interesting curiosity and draws attention from people. This does NOT however mean that Muslims can take this as a pre-text for free mixing with other sexes in order to “give da'wah”. This point comes with strict conditions attached and it is for the discerning Muslim to weight the merit of each situation.

7. Help those with greater needs than yourself.

It is considered a cliché to hold doors for others, but it never fails to attract appreciation. Giving up seat for the elderly or the pregnant or those with little children may come as a natural response to some; Muslims however should always be the first to use initiative that brings comfort to others. When you see anyone who may need assistance, help them as best as you can, give them the right of way and show patience instead of irritation. Whatever ensures the comfort of people should always be preferable to the Muslims. Turn every situation into an opportunity for da'wah.

8. Be self-critical.

Every Muslim is a Da'i whether we are aware of it or not. The Prophet (S) was sent as a witness and a mercy to mankind; Muslims are also witnesses as Allah SWT says: "Thus We have made of you a nation that is justly balanced, that you may be witnesses over the nations..." [translation of Surah Baqarah, 143)

With confidence comes self-appraisal and re-assessment of successes and failures. Muslims should not be afraid to accept criticism from others to improve the way they do things; so long as the recommendations do not involve anything that is contrary to Islam.

9. Do not over-exert yourself

Enthusiasm is good, however we must always remember the Prophetic advice that the best form of charity is that which is done regularly. Da'wah is also a form of charity, where the Muslim spends time and makes effort for the benefit of others. Do not over-exert yourself and take time-out when you need it. Make sure you always spend time to learn and grow with Islamic knowledge. Take enough time to refresh and revitalise the senses as is needed.

10. Wear Islam Responsibly.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah are the 'blueprints' of Islam; when Muslims start to follow them, they will become positive examples to those around them. Whether we like it or not, people will judge Islam mostly by what they see, if people see hypocrisy, internal fighting, cheating, continuous brash debating etc. they will likely dismiss Islam out of hand. They will equate such behaviour with Islam and won't understand that Muslims, who are humans after all, may not always be "Islamic". The fundamental principle of 'practising what you preach' must always be at the forefront of our minds.

The Almighty says: "Do you enjoin right conduct on the people and forget (to practise it) yourselves." (translation of Surah Al-Baqarah, 44) – Muslims cannot on one hand exhort people to high morals when on the other, they lack those very qualities. If people know you to be Muslim, they receive guidance (or misguidance) from your actions, your speech, your way of life, it will work as a guide for the people or it will not.

Allah also says: "O you who believe! Why say you that which you do not (practise)?" (translation of Surah As-Saff, 2) - This is a warning about paying mere paying lip service to Islam, an attitude which can quickly undermine any da'wah effort. For example, when you grow a beard or put on the hijab, be aware of the responsibility it comes with; you represent the Muslims, more than ever. May Allah protect us from anti-da'wah.

In conclusion, the aforementioned points are not unbeknown to human psychology. What is challenging is to revive the noble Islamic characters within the Ummah so that da'wah becomes a by-product that is reflective and inherent in each and every Muslim.

Muslims need to adopt wisdom, gentleness and patience in da'wah. There is no further pressing need than these three qualities. Allah SWT says in the Qur'an: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knows best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance." [translation of Surah 1An-Nahl, 125]

The Prophet's (S) kindness and mercy changed the hearts of the people around him. Muslims need to learn from his (S) Seerah in order to draw people to Islam, instead of driving them away. And only Allah's Help is sought.

Abu Umayza ibn Abdur Rahman